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S E C R E T MADRID 05480

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

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SUBJECT: QADHAFI RETALIATES AGAINST SPANISH EXPULSIONS

REF: A) MADRID 5426, B) MADRID 5425, C) MADRID 5418

1. (C) LIBYA MAY 12 RESPONDED TO FRIDAY'S EXPULSION OF ITS CONSUL GENERAL, CHARGED WITH PASSING FUNDS TO A SPANISH ARMY COLONEL ON THE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC RIGHT, BY PNG'ING THE SPANISH COMMERCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNSELORS IN TRIPOLI. MFA'S SUBDIRECTOR GENERAL FOR NORTH AFRICA TELLS US THAT THE GOS WILL NOT RETALIATE SPECIFICALLY FOR THESE EXPULSIONS; AS INVESTIGATIONS CONTINUE INTO THE LIBYAN ACTIVITIES HERE, HOWEVER, MORE EXPULSIONS ARE QUITE POSSIBLE.

2. (U) AFTER THIS MESSAGE WAS DRAFTED, WE RECEIVED A WIRE SERVICE REPORT QUOTING INTERIOR MINISTER BARRIONUEVO SAYING THAT SPAIN DID NOT PLAN ADDITIONAL LIBYAN EXPULSIONS.

3. (C) COMMENT: IT IS NOT CLEAR WHERE THIS SERIES OF EXPULSIONS AND REPRISALS IS GOING TO TAKE SPANISH-LIBYAN RELATIONS. THE GOS IS DRIVEN BY TWO MUTUALLY-EXCLUSIVE DESIRES. ON THE ONE HAND, IN THIS ELECTORAL PERIOD IT WANTS TO DISCREDIT THE FAR RIGHT (WHICH IT HAS DONE BY PUBLICIZING THE COLONEL'S CONNECTION TO QADHAFI - REF C), AND SHOW IT IS EFFECTIVE AGAINST TERRORISM (WHICH IT DID BY BAGGING THE 10-MAN "CALL OF JESUS CHRIST" GROUP - REF A). AT THE SAME TIME THE GOS WANTS TO AVOID BECOMING A PRINCIPAL TARGET FOR QADHAFI BY PERSERVING AS MUCH OF A RELATIONSHIP AS POSSIBLE. FOREIGN MINISTER ORDONEZ PLAYED TO THE SECOND LINE THIS WEEKEND WHEN HE REFUSED TO COMMENT ON LIBYAN ACTIVITIES HERE, SAYING "I DON'T WANT TO MAKE ANY STATEMENT WHICH MIGHT AGGRAVATE A STATE OF RELATIONS WHICH IS PASSING THROUGH A DELICATE MOMENT." WE UNDERSTAND FROM OUR MFA SOURCE THAT SENIOR MINISTRY OFFICIALS MET TODAY TO DECIDE HOW TO REACT TO LIBYA'S RETALIATION (WHICH LEAVES THE GOS EMBASSY IN TRIPOLI WITH ONLY 3 DIPLOMATS). THE DECISION TO DO NOTHING IS CONSISTENT WITH THE MINISTRY'S LINE -- TAKEN PUBLICLY THIS WEEKEND -- THAT IT DOES NOT WANT TO SEVER RELATIONS WITH TRIPOLI. THIS STRATEGY IS ONLY POSSIBLE IF QADHAFI PLAYS ALONG.

ENDERS